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➤EDITORIAL:NOTES.◀

The Study of a Book.—In a “Contributed Note” (p. 83), Rev. A. A. Pfanstiehl pleads for the study of the Bible in its entirety. The plea is a strong one; no one can dispute the reasonableness of it. In the same connection, we would urge the study of the several books of the Bible, as distinct books. It is true that one’s ideas as to the authorship, occasion, purpose of a book must depend upon his study of the details of the book. In many cases the occasion can only be ascertained by a minute and critical analysis of every verse and even of every word in the book. It is also true, however, that one’s interpretation of detached verses will be largely affected by his conception of the occasion and purpose of the book. While, therefore, it is necessary to examine with great care each verse, in order, from the material thus gathered, to decide the general questions which arise concerning every writing, it is also necessary to have clear and comprehensive ideas on these general questions to decide with certainty the force of words and phrases.

The majority of Bible students are inclined to neglect this general work. The idea prevails that words have fixed meanings, that a sentence must mean the same thing, without particular reference to the speaker, the time, or the circumstances. This idea, we say, prevails largely, and it is, we are assured, the greatest bane of modern biblical study. Men must learn that the same words in the mouth of Moses, or of David, or of Ezra meant, in each case, something different. Before the true force of an expression can be understood, there must be known the general purpose of the whole book of which that expression is a part. Each book in the Canon had a purpose to serve. Let us take up the Bible by books and seek to ascertain, so far as there is a basis for a decision, the place, the purpose of that particular book. Such study will make us broader and better Bible students.

Model Preachers.—Do pastors generally regard in a true light the office and work of the Old Testament prophet? It is conceded by all teachers and students that for the preacher there is no better help than the study of other preachers and their preaching. And so, those who are preparing for the ministry, as well as those who are in the active work of the ministry, devote attention to the study of sermons preached by the world’s great preachers, Whitefield, Chalmers, Edwards, and a host of others. This, of course, is as it should be. But does not the Old Testament give us the lives of some most wonderful preachers? And does this same volume not contain the record of some most wonderful sermons? It is not to be forgotten that these preachers sustained the same relation to their times, as do ours to the present time. Our conception of the prophet is too frequently an erroneous one. We fail to appreciate the fact that, like our ministers, it was his function to rebuke sin and to warn the impenitent, to direct men’s thoughts to salvation through a Messiah, to act as the authorized expounder of the principles of the law as he knew it. We think of him rather as a hermit, as an ascetic, as one falling into ecstasies, as mechanically uttering words placed in his mouth by

God, as a dreamer, looking far down into the future with no thought of his own times, of his own surroundings. But this view, while true in part, is, when taken as a whole, entirely false and misleading.

Let us get a correct idea of the work and life of the prophet; let us understand that we who preach are, in the true sense of the word, *prophets*; for that word does not strictly mean *fore-teller*, but *for-teller*, not one who speaks *before-hand*, but one who speaks *for* another, God. And with this conception, remembering, likewise, that these men spoke as prompted by the events of their times, by the sins and crimes of their fellow-men, by political prosperity or adversity, for such is often God's way of prompting men to the service he desires,—keeping all this in mind, let us study the sermons of Isaiah, whose most frequent theme was “salvation,” the sermons of Hosea, who all the time preached “love,” the sermons of Amos, whose text was “justice,” the story of Jonah, the keynote to which was “repentance brings salvation.”

The Old Testament prophets were preachers, their words were sermons, some written and never spoken, some spoken and written later,—sermons which the Christian minister will find, when *treated* as sermons, to be models of eloquence, expression, and thought.

The Use of Common Sense in Interpretation.—Interpreters of the Bible, in our day, may conveniently be divided into three great schools: (1) the rationalistic, or naturalistic, (2) the allegorizing, or spiritualizing, and (3) the historico-grammatical. Each school starts with certain great principles, and does its work in accordance with these principles. The naturalist says, Miracles were never wrought, events were never predicted, there is no such thing as the supernatural. The allegorist says, There is contained in every passage of Scripture, besides the usual sense, a hidden sense, an obscure meaning, for the discovery of which the interpreter can use no principles or laws, but must depend upon his individual judgment; this second and independent meaning is, however, by far the more important. The historico-grammatical interpreter says, Words have certain definite significations; grammatical forms have an established force; that signification and that force which usage has assigned a given word or form, with such modification as is required by the historical circumstances of the writer, were the signification and the force *divinely* intended to be conveyed. Ascertain these, and you have interpreted the passage under consideration.

Now it is plainly evident that, to whatever class one may belong, there is, after all that may be said, a large field for the use of common sense. But there are some who go so far as to say that the great majority of Bible interpreters, of every school, however wise they may be in other pursuits, abandon for the most part this important accompaniment, at the very moment the study of a scriptural passage is taken up. And there is, it must be confessed, too much truth in this assertion.

We must admit that of the disciple of the naturalistic or the allegorizing schools, working, as he does, according to principles so contrary to all that is known and reasonable, little can be expected. But how is it with those of the third school, which may be truly said to be *the* school of our century? Is there any excuse for the display of a lack of common sense on the part of those who work with lexicon and grammar, and whose results are supposed to be in accord with these?